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Probers Skimp On King File

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WASHINGTON — Investigators for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence have declined to examine fully the file compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation on the activities of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., despite an offer from the Justice Department to make the complete file available to the committee staff.

One Justice Department official said in an interview that Senate investigators had thus far asked to see only "about half" of the 96-volume FBI file on King, which the official said was begun in the late 1950s after the civil rights leader had attained prominence in the South, and was closed when he was assassinated in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

THE PORTION of the FBI materials that committee staff members examined laid the basis for the panel's disclosure last month that the bureau's surveillance of King on some 25 occasions had extended to include various harassments, such as mailing anonymously to him in 1964 a tape recording, made from an FBI listening device, in which he reportedly was sexually compromised.

The official, who asked not to be named, said he understood that the committee's reluctance to view the remainder of the file, which he said contained a number of similar incidents of harassment that occurred before the 1964 mailing, had been based on an appeal from King's family to refrain from looking into areas of FBI activity that would involve disclosure of King's personal life.

A spokesman for the panel, which is headed by Sen. Frank Church, Idaho, confirmed that the committee had been "selective" in its examination of the FBI's file on King, but added that the decision not "to make an exhaustive search" had been the committee's own.

Asked the reason behind the decision to leave untouched the remainder of the King file, the spokesman replied that "we saw enough to satisfy our needs."

He added, however, that the panel's FBI task force was not "talking about" asking the Justice Department for the rest of the materials.

Harry Wachtel, a Manhattan lawyer who represents the interests of King's family, said by telephone Tuesday that he had never asked the committee not to examine in private any government records relating to the surveillance or harassment of King.